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ABSTRACT

The self-interests of the primary participants in the school and the common welfare as represented in the improvement of the American educational system are most likely to become one in the process of improving the school as a work place. This strategy was explored in the form of a collaborative enterprise. Eighteen schools in southern California and the research division of the Institute for Development of Educational Activities, Inc., (IDEA), engaged in the internal process of self-renewal in each school through sustained dialogue, decision-making, action, and evaluation on the part of the entire faculty under the leadership of the principal. This involved a network of schools within which ideas, resources, and practices were developed and exchanged; a continuous self-directed seminar in which the principals discussed their problems and developed necessary leadership understandings, and skills; and a variety of pedagogical interchanges for teachers. (Author/MLF)

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TOWARD THE CREATION OF SATISFYING WORK PLACES*

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INTRODUCTION

Our social institutions are in disarray: the family, the courts, our governmental agencies, the postal service, and our schools. Evidence of this fact comes as regularly as the daily paper and is ingested with the morning cup of coffee. Institutions are the bones of our civilization. When they crumble, civilization itself crumbles.

Twenty-five years ago, when an older colleague said that our secondary schools were moving toward serious trouble and could well crumble and disappear before the end of the century, I thought he was being melodramatic. Now I realize that he saw trends and read signs which I was not yet experienced enough or wise enough to perceive and read. There are those who believe that our schools should be abolished or simply left to wither away--and, indeed, the deschooling of society has been seriously proposed. I doubt that many people in this audience think this way.

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*Address delivered at the Annual Convention of the American Association of School Administrators, Atlantic City, New Jersey, February 20, 1976.

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It is my belief--virtually my credo--that our schools should and must be reconstructed. This cannot be done by fiat or through some grandiose innovation, however ingenious. It must take place at the grass roots level, school by school, community by community, through satisfying hard work. In the process we may very well provide what is needed for the reconstruction of other institutions and society itself.

This does not mean that all the other agencies and offices in our educational system are to play no role or are to be dismantled. But it probably means some simplifying and streamlining. And it most certainly means sharper focus and a more clearly supporting or helping role for the federal government, state agencies, boards of education, and superintendents of schools. To have a clearer sense of priorities with the welfare of the individual school front and center would be an innovation of some considerable magnitude and significance.

Although the words I use are familiar--perhaps to the point of boredom--we have not internalized what they mean, let alone created the policies and launched the actions they imply. Strangely,

although criticism of the schools is virtually a national pastime we have given very little attention to improving the school as a total system; as a dynamic entity of interacting parts. Instead, we have focused attention on the parts. We have sought to improve the curriculum, the teaching of reading and mathematics, the organization of the school, or something else--usually separately and independently from one another as though all of these existed as discrete entities, divorced from the corpus of the school.

THE PROBLEM

The first setp in seeking to develop new, sound public policy and in taking subsequent action is to arrive at a reasonably good diagnosis of the problem. An obvious element in the disarray of the schools is that so many people and so many segments of our society perceive them not to be doing well. Right or wrong, these perceptions must be treated as reality, as fact. There really is no good way to judge whether our schools are doing well or poorly since we do not know what they are doing. Our present indicators are achievement test scores. The schools are largely unstudied phenomena. We do not know what is taught there, how it is taught, how the people feel about what they are doing or anything else of basic importance to policy

development. We have only a few intriguing glimpses and our own idiosyncratic beliefs.

Further, there is not anywhere in our society a consistent, clearly articulated set of expectations for our schools. At various times we want them to teach the fundamentals or to develop self-expression or to prepare the students for specific jobs or to develop individual talent. Most of the time, regardless of what is heard loudest above the cacophony of sound, we want the schools to do all of these things. It is fair to say that the schools suffer from an overload of expectations and lack of any criteria or guidelines for sorting out clear priorities among conflicting expectations. If our schools go under it will be primarily because we expected too much of them.

This clutter of unclarified expectations on the outside is reflected in the schools by convulsive spasms. They do not know whether to opt for alternatives or for basics; nor do they know what is basic and what alternatives are alternative to. Given the present climate, to be confused may be a better posture than to be clear.

Just as problems for the school as an institution come from

without, there are problems within. There is emerging a dangerously divided profession. The definitions of management and of employees for purposes of collective bargaining may very well place teachers on one side of the table and administrators down to the level of assistant principal on the other side of the table. If or when this occurs--and it already has occurred in some places--the profession will be divided into "we" and "they" factions.

But this is not the only division. A very large proportion of the teaching profession is made up of specialists first and educators second. Many of these specialists are far more concerned about getting more of what they represent into the curriculum than they are about balance and quality in the education of students. Further, many of these specialists function remote from the educational process, never becoming integrally a part of real programs for real students in real schools.

As a result of the division between administrators at the building level and teachers, and this further splintering into specializations, particularly at the secondary school level, there is not in each school a critical mass of professionals concerned about

and planning for the total educational experience of the young people in their charge. They teach a curriculum--or pieces of it--but not people.

The rift between the profession and the public already has reached dangerous proportions. However, unless present trends are radically redirected or reversed, the rift will grow wider. To my dismay I find that much of the conventional wisdom in current thinking about collective bargaining proposes that the goals, content, organization and methods of the curriculum be regarded as optional items for negotiation. This is incredible. Government acts pertaining to collective bargaining in the field of education should specify that the curriculum is specifically ruled out as an item of and for negotiation. The education profession now has an opportunity to provide statesmanlike leadership by insisting that this be so. Increasingly the public is demanding a greater voice in the affairs of our schools. At the heart of this interest is the curriculum. If the public finds that the curriculum is now something for management and employees to squabble over, the cries of outrage will be louder than anything we have heard before.

A major obstacle to the kind of reconstruction I have in mind is that our models of schooling and of educational reform are outworn. It is doubtful that current models ever were appropriate. The prevailing model of schooling is an industrial one: the school is a factory. As a consequence, expectations for schooling stress efficiency and Callahan's Cult of Efficiency is as relevant today as when he wrote it. Even though education is a process through which substance and the individual are linked, we give very little thought to the nature and quality of linkages. Nor do we give much thought to the quality of life in the work place--the place where one's humanity is forged.

Because we hold to this factory model of schooling, we hold also to a simplistic input-environmental response-output model of educational change. We measure the dollars going in at one end and the product coming out at the other and there is supposed to be some measurable relationship between the two. One of the surprising things, given the success of our pragmatism in other realms, is that we go on employing this model even when it does not produce results. We blame administrators or teachers or students but fail to question the approach

itself. When the students become alienated and rebellious we propose, first, stricter discipline and then, when this appears not to be working, we propose to throw them out at the age of fourteen, with little thought to the effect of this on the rest of the ecosystem, let alone on the individual.

There is little doubt in my mind that we need to put together an array of educational institutions--the home, the school, the media, business, industry and the like--in a total ecology of education. The very best way to move in this direction is to help the school become a healthy subculture. Schools have, in part, an instrumental role to play in serving other institutions and the rest of society. They cannot perform these roles effectively unless they are, themselves, healthy. The indicators of health are embedded in the life of the school as a workplace.

RECONSTRUCTING THE SCHOOL AS A WORK PLACE

I am speaking today to the people who, as individuals and as a group, probably can do more than any other individuals or groups to encourage and support the kind of school-by-school reconstruction we need. But a fundamentally different perspective or way of viewing the educational system is required. The bureaucratic complexity making up

this system must be reduced, conceptually and to some degree operationally, so as to view the individual school as the largest organic unit for educational change. When we come right down to it, the educational system is made up of educational institutions and can be reduced to 500 children, their teachers, the principal and staff in Hawthorne Elementary or the 1200 students with their teachers, principal and staff in Dickens High. All the rest is superstructure existing, presumably, only to support and serve Hawthorne Elementary and Dickens High multiplied many times over. Of course, we know that this is not the way the superstructure functions or perceives itself. Much of its time, energy and resources go into its own maintenance and self preservation.

Each cluster of students, professionals, support staff and things together constitute an ecosystem, a school culture, functioning well, badly, or indifferently. It is an incomplete culture, coming to a virtual standstill each day and starting up again the next day. Although it is resilient, it is in many ways quite fragile. It survives even when a good deal of the life is crushed out of it but it survives feebly.

The people making up this culture have self interests. In many ways the self interests that have come to be dominant in the school have been conditioned by the model of change used by reformers to "improve" the school. This model attributes very little in the way of self-renewing ability on the part of those in the schools and assumes that change must come from the outside. Consequently, many of the altruistic and professional concerns which teachers might be expected to have become, at best, only a kind of second-level self interest. The dominant self interests are survival, getting through the day, and improving the monetary rewards. The self interests of the students too often become "making it" in the system or "copping out" as unobtrusively as possible. Some stay more or less at war with the system.

In large measure these kinds of self interests tend to parallel the dominant tendencies in the society generally. Too many people simply have rejected civilization and what true responsible belonging to it means. They want only what they can get out of it. Consequently, there is little of that productive tension between self and environment through which the autonomous self, living <u>with</u> civilization, is shaped

and develops. Teaching becomes not good work but just another job.

The most powerful force for change, good or bad, is self-interest. For change to be good and constructive, self-interest and the common welfare must become virtually one.

I believe that the self-interests of the primary participants in the school and the common welfare as represented in the improvement of the American educational system are most likely to become one in the process of improving the school as a work place. There is little likelihood of it occurring through identification with one's specialization, ~~through~~ a professional association, or ~~through~~ a union, or all of these, although properly focused on the school as a culture, each can make its appropriate contribution.

What I am saying lies in the face of so many things that are current as to have difficulty finding any currency whatsoever. Worse, it smacks of idealistic old fashioned liberalism and few things are less popular today than the liberal ideal.

My position and proposal stem from personal beliefs about the nature of the human self and some recent experience in working with schools for the purpose of improving the quality of life there. I do

not believe that most people, given the choice, would choose just to survive on a job or get through the day in order to find satisfactions elsewhere. Life is too short to spend in getting over one week-end to prepare for the next or in looking forward to vacations and then to retirement, so soon followed by death. From a simple, practical point of view is it not much better to have, not just a job, but satisfying work? Admittedly, there are some jobs still with us that virtually deny conversion into satisfying work. But surely these do not include teaching and the leadership role in operating schools. A great many of us went into education as a career because we thought we would find there satisfying work. A pay raise tomorrow might enhance one's use of leisure but it would do little or nothing to change the quality of the workplace.

I happen to believe that good work is basic to the quality of life. In two words, Freud summed up what is basic in life: love and work.

In brief summary, I am saying that human beings require good work--not just jobs, but good work. A very large part of good work requires a good workplace. It is, therefore, in one's deepest self-

interest to create a good work place. Those who work there are the primary participants in creating that work place. Since the individual school is what our education system ultimately comes down to, the improvement of schooling and the self-interests of those in the school become one in the reconstruction of the individual school. The task of the rest of the system is to provide a supporting infrastructure.

Beginning in the 1950's, as best as I am able to determine, these propositions began to take shape in my mind in the form of an hypothesis--indeed, a working principle--regarding a potentially productive strategy for the improvement of schooling. This strategy, in turn, took shape in the late 1960's through the early 1970's in the form of a collaborative enterprise focused on the individual school as the largest organic unit for improvement. Eighteen schools in Southern California and the research division of the Institute for Development of Educational Activities, Incorporated, joined in a symbiotic relationship. The quid pro quo was that IDEA would be permitted--and indeed encouraged in its efforts--to study the schools in their effort to improve themselves and the schools, in turn, would benefit from the

support, encouragement, and resources of our office. We offered no innovations, no panaceas, and no party line--just a willingness to assist the schools with whatever they wanted to do. The League of Cooperating Schools was itself the innovation. The six years of collaboration were spent in massaging the infrastructure of the League so that the self-interests of the collaborating parties would be met and the educational enterprise would be enhanced.

The fact that we presented neither problems nor solutions, expressed no specific expectations, offered neither bribes nor rewards, and foisted on the schools no ready-made solutions to preconceived problems presented the schools with a disturbingly unfamiliar scenario. The principals in particular looked for the hidden agenda. At some time or other, sooner or later, John Goodlad and his staff would tell them what to do and they in turn would tell the teachers what to do. As one principal put it later, "It didn't happen; believe me, it didn't happen".

It is somewhat chilling for me to realize that we have so long operated in an externally-oriented model of school improvement, that those in the schools look for no other schema, are thrown off balance,

and become somewhat distrustful, suspicious, and ultimately angry in the face of the alternative briefly described. Part of the anger arises, of course, out of the fact that they meet the enemy and he is they.

Time prevents me from going into the details of this symbiotic relationship and what evolved in it and from it. The story is told in a series of documentary films available from the IDEA organization in Dayton and a series of books published by McGraw-Hill. The critical elements were: ~~in~~ internal process of self-renewal in each school conducted through sustained dialogue, decision-making, action and evaluation on the part of the entire faculty under the leadership of the principal and with our help; a reinforcing, reassuring network of schools within which ideas, resources and practices were developed and exchanged; a hub or center providing but not endorsing ideas, materials, human resources, and the like; and, above all, continuing, non-punitive, unquestioning support and encouragement; a continuous self directed seminar in which the principals discussed their problems and developed necessary leadership understandings and skills; and a variety of pedagogical interchanges through which teachers wanting help secured help from those able to give it. At the heart

of it all was the idea that each individual school, with appropriate support and encouragement, could become sensitive to its own needs, competent in defining them, and discriminating in the selection of resources from within the consortium and from without in the ongoing process of self-improvement. It was essentially a process of improving the quality of work and the quality of the work place through a process of reconstruction.

Time prevents me from elaborating how the role involves the other elements of our educational system: superintendents, supervisors, teacher educators, research, and so on. I have spelled these out in some detail in my most recent book, The Dynamics of Educational Change (McGraw-Hill, 1975). The strategy eliminates none of these but it does call for a fundamentally different orientation on the part of each. There is here, for one thing, true decentralization of both responsibility and authority to the local school. The principal becomes not an arm of management but the leader of the organic unit which is the school. The effective principal creates a certain amount of tension between himself and his superior, the superintendent. The understanding superintendent now looks for this quality in the principal and both

encourages and rewards it. The shift toward this productive tension is not welcomed by those superintendents who are unsure of themselves and who cannot tolerate the challenge of strong leadership at the local level. But the superintendent must come to understand that this is a large part of what the decentralization we have talked about means. The strong superintendent will encourage a local school and its leadership to be strong because therein, ultimately, will lie renewal and strength in American education.

Much of what occurred in the League of Cooperating Schools confirmed what I had believed in the first place. But I was not [illegible] confident in these beliefs.

I had seen and heard so much that contradicted these beliefs that I was at times shaken, even though I could see very little evidence that the prevailing models of schooling and school improvement were working. It took this experience with the League to elevate my hypotheses to the level of principles and it is by these principles that I probably shall be guided for the rest of my career.

This is an age in which Waldens, in the sense of Thoreau's Walden, are hard to come by. The Waldens we dreamed of in our youth

are covered up now by housing tracts or factories or are polluted. Even the most remote ones now have too much of what we are trying to run away from.

Of course, if we study Thoreau's biography, we discover that he did not get away, either. Thoreau only "bivouacked" at Walden, going home every day. His hut was not carved out of the wilderness but was essentially a pre-fab purchased from a fisherman and assembled in pieces. It was quite the fashion to hold picnics on his front doorstep and, when it rained, visitors swarmed into his tiny cabin. Although at one time Thoreau railed, "Wherever man goes, men will pursue him and paw him with their dirty institutions and if they can, constrain him to belong to their desperate oddfellow society", he nonetheless noted in Walden, "I have three chairs in my house: one for solitude, two for friendship, three for society".

No, we must create our own Waldens. What better place for principals, teachers and students to begin than with reconstructing the school as a work place? And what better work for superintendents than to help them do it? Happiness will not then be something one pursues on week-ends or in the next job or in retirement, but something one finds each day in the to be ~~experienced~~ in work, and ~~the~~ work place.